



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Shoshone Field Office
400 West F Street
Shoshone, Idaho 83352-5284
(208) 732-7200



In Reply Refer To:
4100 (IDT030) P
80235
CERTIFIED-RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

March 15, 2016

Dear Permittee/Interested Public:

We want to inform you the Idaho BLM is currently scoping for information pertaining to the Poison Creek Allotment as a means to seek public input to help us analyze permit renewal proposals through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Soliciting your comments at the start of the NEPA process helps us to ensure that pertinent issues are identified and studied early, and items that are of minimal concern do not unnecessarily consume your time and effort.

This letter is to notify you that the Shoshone Field Office is asking for your thoughts and comments for the Poison Creek Allotment Grazing Permit Renewal EA, **NEPA No. DOI-BLM-ID-T030-2016-0012-EA**. The Scoping/Information Package for this project proposal can be found on the internet at:

https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/lup/lup_register.do

A previous Scoping Package pertaining to the Poison Creek Grazing Permit Renewal EA was mailed out to all interested parties on March 19, 2007 but an EA was not completed at that time. One comment letter was received addressing the original Scoping Package. The original comments will be incorporated into the environmental assessment but now is also an opportunity to comment once again.

Your comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received on or before April 1, 2016 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area; the BLM will continue to accept feedback beyond this date, up to June 1, 2016.

Please submit your comments in writing to either the Shoshone Field Office or to **ekriwox@blm.gov**. The primary contact for questions and comments related to this analysis is Erik Kriwox, Rangeland Management Specialist, and he can be reached at (208) 732-7266.

Sincerely,

/s/ Codie Martin

Codie Martin
Shoshone Field Manager

cc:

Camas Creek Cattle Association, LLC, P.O. Box 333, Fairfield, ID 83327
Wood River Land Trust, c/o Keri York, 119 E Bullion St., Hailey, ID 83333
Audubon Society, Prairie Falcon Chapter, Attn: Julie Randall, 3952 North
3600 East, Kimberly, ID 83341
Blaine County Commissioners, 206 1st Ave S Ste. 300, Hailey, ID 83333
Committee for the High Desert, P.O. Box 2863, Boise, ID 83701
ICL Public Lands Office, P.O. Box 844, Boise, ID 83701
Idaho Chapter Wild Sheep Foundation, c/o Jim Jeffress, P.O. Box 8224,
Boise, ID 83707-2224
Idaho Department of Fish and Game, 319 S 417 E, Suite 1, Hwy 93 Business
Park, Jerome, ID 83338
Idaho Department of Lands, Eastern Idaho Supervisory Area, 324 S 417 E,
Suite 2, Jerome, ID 83338
Idaho State Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Industries,
Attn: Brooke Jacobson, 2270 Penitentiary Road, PO Box 790, Boise, ID
83701-0790
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, P.O. Box 306, Fort Hall, ID 83203
Western Watersheds Project, c/o Ken Cole, P.O. Box 2863, Boise, ID 83701
Wildlands Defense, c/o Katie Fite, P.O. Box 125, Boise, ID 83701
Paul McClain, 619 Elm Circle, Gooding, ID 83330-1863
Jim Prunty, Natural Resource Specialist, 1241 Starfire, Twin Falls, ID 83301
David Skinner, P.O. Box 664, Fairfield, ID, 83327
Mel Quale, Quale Electronics, 1730 Kimberly Rd, Twin Falls, ID 83301
Dr. Balthasar Buhidar, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, 650
Addison Avenue West, Suite 110, Twin Falls, ID 83301

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

**Twin Falls District
Shoshone Field Office**
400 West F Street
Shoshone, ID 83352

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

**POISON CREEK ALLOTMENT (#80215)
GRAZING PERMIT RENEWAL**

NEPA No. DOI-BLM-ID-T030-2016-0012-EA

The information in this package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to authorize permit renewals in the Poison Creek Allotment. The action being analyzed is the renewal of livestock grazing permits in the Poison Creek Allotment per 43 Code of Federal Regulations (43CFR), Subpart 4180-Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration in accordance with the 1981 Sun Valley Management Framework Plan (MFP) and the 2015 Resource Management Plan Amendment for the Great Basin Region, Including the Greater Sage-Grouse Sub-Regions of Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, Oregon, Utah. Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this document is to inform you and other interested and affected parties of this proposal, and to solicit your comments to assist us with the NEPA review of the proposal. The analysis of this proposal is currently ongoing, and will eventually be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of fall 2016. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose and need for the project.

Need for the Grazing Permit Renewal EA:

The 2005 Fundamentals of Rangeland Health (43 CFR 4180.1) requires the BLM to assess resource conditions on allotments when grazing permits expire. The final Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (USDI BLM, 1997), herein referred to as Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health or Rangeland Health, require the BLM to determine if public lands are achieving the standards and conforming to the guidelines.

The need for this action is established by the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan (MFP), and the September 2015 Approved Resource Management Plan Amendments for the Great Basin Region, Including the Greater Sage-Grouse Sub-Regions, and the grazing regulations (43 CFR §

4130.1), which require that the BLM respond to applications to fully process and renew permits to graze livestock on public land. The underlying need for the proposed action is to respond to the permittees' applications to renew their grazing permits in the Poison Creek Allotment and to incorporate Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health into the management of the allotment. Rangeland Health standards are used as management goals by the BLM for the betterment of the environment, protection of cultural resources, and sustained productivity of the range. They were developed with the specific intent of providing for the multiple-use of the public lands. The regulations direct that existing grazing management be modified through the term permit to ensure that Rangeland Health standards are achieved. Ultimately, the intent of the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health is to ensure that the resources within the allotment are meeting or are making significant progress toward meeting the standards.

Purpose(s) of the Grazing Permit Renewal EA:

Based on the mandates of the aforementioned authorities, the purpose of the analysis is to determine whether or not to continue to authorize livestock grazing use in the Poison Creek Allotment. Permitted grazing, if continued, would carry forth in a manner consistent with the laws and regulations governing these activities. Through this upcoming environmental analysis, a decision will be rendered which will supersede the existing grazing permits for the Poison Creek Allotment and result in a specific season of use, number and kind of livestock, Animal Unit Months (AUMs), and management prescription. Based on the results of the NEPA analysis, the authorized officer will make an informed decision as to what terms and conditions to implement to renew grazing permits and authorize trailing permits.

Existing Condition

The Poison Creek Allotment is located in Blaine County, Idaho in Townships 1 North and 1 South, and Range 17 East. The allotment is located approximately seven miles west of the Timmerman Hills intersection of Highways 75 and 20 (Richardson Summit, Idaho and Magic Reservoir West, Idaho U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000 topographical quadrangles). Elevations in this allotment range from 5,000 to 6,000 feet. The allotment is bordered on the south by unallocated public lands managed by the BLM, on the west by the Croy Creek and Shirley Allotments, on the north and east by the Scattered Tracts Allotment. Private lands border the allotment to the Southwest. The Poison Creek Allotment is comprised of 5,465 public land acres managed by the BLM, approximately 400 acres of State of Idaho Endowment land managed by Idaho Department of Lands and approximately 750 acres of private land.

Wood River Land Trust (WRLT) and Camas Creek Cattle Association, LLC. (CCR) are the current permittees in the Poison Creek Allotment.

WRLT and CCR both currently hold permits to graze cattle from May 15th through August 1st. In addition, Goodtime Grazing Association has a permit to trail sheep through the allotment from May 1st through July 15th and from October 15th through November 15th. Most of the use made by cattle occurs early in the season, and ends prior to the end of the grazing season due to shortages of stockwater later in the summer. The sheep typically trail through the allotment in late summer or fall.

The WRLT grazing permit allows for 191 head of cattle to graze from 5/15 to 8/1 for a total of 497 AUMs. The CCR grazing permit allows for 79 head of cattle to graze from 5/15 to 8/1 for a

total of 36 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) billed at 73% public land. The WRLT permit has been used nearly every year since at least 1975, although Actual Use records indicate that AUMs used under this permit have averaged 47% of allocated AUMs since 1993. The WRLT permit was not used in 2015.

Since acquiring their permit in 2005, CCR has not used the Poison Creek Allotment; this same permit, although held by several different permittees, has not been activated since the 1992 grazing season. The current authorizations are shown in Table 1.

Actual Use records since 1975 indicate that 14 different permittees (including WRLT and CCR) have held cattle grazing permits in the Poison Creek Allotment. One sheep operator held a permit in the allotment until 1983, and one sheep operator currently holds a permit to trail sheep through the allotment.

The BLM is required to assess resource conditions on the allotment in conjunction with Technical Reference 1731-6 *Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health* (2000) and the final *Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management* (1997). Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines are used as management goals by the BLM for the betterment of the environment, protection of cultural resources, and sustained productivity of the range. They were developed with the specific intent of providing for multiple use of the public lands. The regulations direct that existing grazing management be modified through the term permit to ensure that rangeland health standards are achieved. Ultimately, the intent of the fundamentals of rangeland health and the Idaho standards is to ensure that the resources within the allotment are meeting the Standards for Rangeland Health or are making significant progress towards meeting the Standards.

A Rangeland Health field assessment for the Poison Creek Allotment was completed in 2005 and sent to permittees and interested publics on March 19, 2007. One public comment letter was received for Poison Creek Allotment in regard to the Rangeland Health Assessment on April 18, 2007 and will be considered in the environmental analysis. Additional rangeland health data as well as Sage-grouse Habitat Assessment Framework (HAF) data were collected during the summer of 2015, and will be further analyzed and used in the NEPA document. Older data including what was used in the previous Rangeland Health Assessment will be carried forward where it is still accurate and applicable.

Livestock grazing use within the majority (all areas north of Highway 20) of the allotment was analyzed in the 1981 Sun Valley Management Framework Plan (MFP). The area south of the highway is covered under the 1975 Magic MFP, although management of the entire allotment has been under the Sun Valley MFP. Prior to the Sun Valley MFP being implemented, the grazing preference within the allotment was 766 cattle AUMs and 133 sheep AUMs. Subsequent to the Sun Valley MFP, Decisions implemented in 1983 and 1984 converted the sheep AUMs to cattle and reduced the total preference in the allotment to the current level of 533 cattle AUMs. In a 1998 Decision, management of the allotment was placed under an Allotment Management Plan (AMP). Under the Poison Creek Allotment AMP, the season of use was changed from May 15 to September 30 to the current season of use of May 15 to August 1. The Proposed Action described in this document is in conformance with the 1981 Sun Valley MFP

and decision and the September 2015 Approved Resource Management Plan Amendments for the Great Basin Region, Including the Greater Sage-Grouse Sub-Regions. The allotment is currently managed under a three-pasture rest-rotation system wherein one pasture receives season-long rest and the two remaining pastures are used on a rotating schedule of either early-summer or summer use. Generally the early pasture is used from May 15 through approximately June 25, and the summer pasture is used from June 25 through the end of the grazing season.

Additional data will be necessary to properly analyze livestock grazing in the Poison Creek Allotment. Riparian Proper Function Condition (PFC) data will be collected in the spring/early summer of 2016 to assess what, if any, effects current livestock grazing may be having on streams and riparian areas within the allotment. Range improvements will also be assessed to determine what effect they may be having on habitat for the Greater Sage-grouse within the allotment.

It is important to identify the roads and/or trails used by motorized vehicles necessary to manage livestock and associated infrastructure within the allotment so the impacts can be assessed and specific terms and conditions related to motorized vehicles can be included in the permit.

Due to the additional data needs within the allotment, scoping for this grazing permit renewal process is purposely indefinite and open. Specific alternatives will be developed as resource concerns are identified and data is analyzed. The NEPA document will analyze a Proposed Action, a Reduced Grazing Alternative, a No-Action Alternative, a No-Grazing Alternative, and additional alternatives as needed that will meet the purpose and need of the federal action.

Preliminary Issues

The Poison Creek Allotment contains Important as well as Priority and Sagebrush Focal Area (SFA) Sage-grouse habitat as determined by the September 2015 Approved Resource Management Plan Amendments for the Great Basin Region, including the Greater Sage-Grouse Sub-Regions. The allotment is considered to be winter range for elk and mule deer. Due to the May 15 turnout date, there is the potential for sage grouse nesting displacement during the spring.

Poison Creek and several of its tributaries including Little Poison Creek are located in the center of the allotment. Additionally, several perennial and intermittent tributaries of Rock Creek, as well as multiple springs are also located in the allotment. Several reaches of perennial stream were assessed for PFC in 2005-2006, and each was rated as Functional-At-Risk (FAR), with some reaches showing no apparent trend, and some reaches showing a downward trend. Portions of the streams within the allotment are on public, private, and state lands. Over the past decade the condition in the riparian areas appear to have made progress towards meeting the riparian and wetland standards, however, current PFC data on both streams and springs within the allotment is needed to make a final determination. Whether or not actual progress has been made in the riparian areas of the Poison Creek Allotment will be analyzed in the upcoming EA and some changes in livestock use may be considered, as needed, either to make progress or maintain progress.

Proposed Action (Actual Use)

The Proposed Action that will be analyzed is to issue new grazing permits for each of the two permittees for a ten-year term. The new grazing permits would authorize livestock use in the Poison Creek Allotment and incorporate the Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration (43 CFR 4180). This alternative will describe the on-the-ground management action that the BLM proposes to implement and represents the proposed Management Guidelines. Under the Proposed Action, the BLM would analyze renewing the grazing permits with the number of AUMs changing to an average actual use level. This would potentially mean a reduction of AUMs by approximately 50%, although the change would actually be an accurate reflection of on-the-ground AUMs that have been utilized over the last 20 years. The Proposed Action also would assess changing the season of use to June 15th through September 1st, which would place livestock turnout in a time period after the Sage-grouse nesting season. However, in order to shift grazing use to a later season, additional water sources may need to be established. At this time, no specific range improvements are proposed, however, based on BLM analysis and permittee proposals, it is anticipated that spring development and/or riparian fencing may be a fundamental part of the Proposed Action. Any range improvements analyzed through the EA and subsequently implemented would be in conformance with the 1981 Sun Valley Management Framework Plan (MFP) and the 2015 Resource Management Plan Amendment for the Great Basin Region, Including the Greater Sage-Grouse Sub-Regions of Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, Oregon, Utah.

The Proposed Action would continue to implement the current three-pasture rest-rotation grazing system. Some flexibility in the livestock numbers would be allowed as long as grazing does not occur outside of the season of use, utilization levels do not exceed 40%, and the active preference on the grazing permits are not exceeded. Any livestock use outside of the Terms and Conditions of the permit that has not been approved by the Authorized Officer would be in violation of the grazing permit and a trespass may be warranted.

Preliminary Alternative Development

Alternative I – Reduced Grazing:

Under this alternative, new 10 year grazing permits would be issued wherein an additional reduction from the actual use (Proposed Action) would be implemented; all other terms and conditions of the permits, the season of use, the number of livestock, would be the same as under the Proposed Action.

Alternative II - No Action (current permitted use):

Under this alternative, there would be no change from current permitted use in the allotment; the season of use and the number of livestock as described in Table 1 below would remain unchanged.

Table 1: Current Grazing Permit Authorizations

Current Permittee	Livestock #	Days	Grazing Season	%PL	Active AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Total AUMs
Camas Creek Cattle Association, LLC.	19 Cattle	79	5/15 to 8/1	73%	36	52	88
Wood River Land Trust	191 Cattle	79	5/15 to 8/1	100%	497	735	1,232

Alternative III - No Grazing:

Under the No Grazing Alternative, the grazing permit for the Poison Creek Allotment would not be renewed, and livestock grazing on public land in the allotment would not be authorized. The permittees would retain their current AUMs in the allotment, and would be issued non-use grazing permits which would discontinue livestock grazing in the allotment for a term of 10 years.

Decision to be Made

The Shoshone Field Manager will decide whether to authorize livestock grazing activities as described in the Proposed Action, each of the Action Alternatives, or a combination of alternatives. The Field Manager will make a decision with management actions, mitigation measures, and monitoring requirements prescribed, including permitted number of animals, season of use, allowable utilization standards, and terms of the permit.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received within 30 days of receiving this document and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA.

Written comments must be submitted to Codie Martin, Shoshone Field Manager, Shoshone Field Office, 400 West F Street, Shoshone, ID 83352. The office business hours for submitting hand-delivered comments are 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc), or portable document format (.pdf) to **id_shoshone_fo@blm.gov**. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected. To be most helpful, comments sent electronically should include the title of this project in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

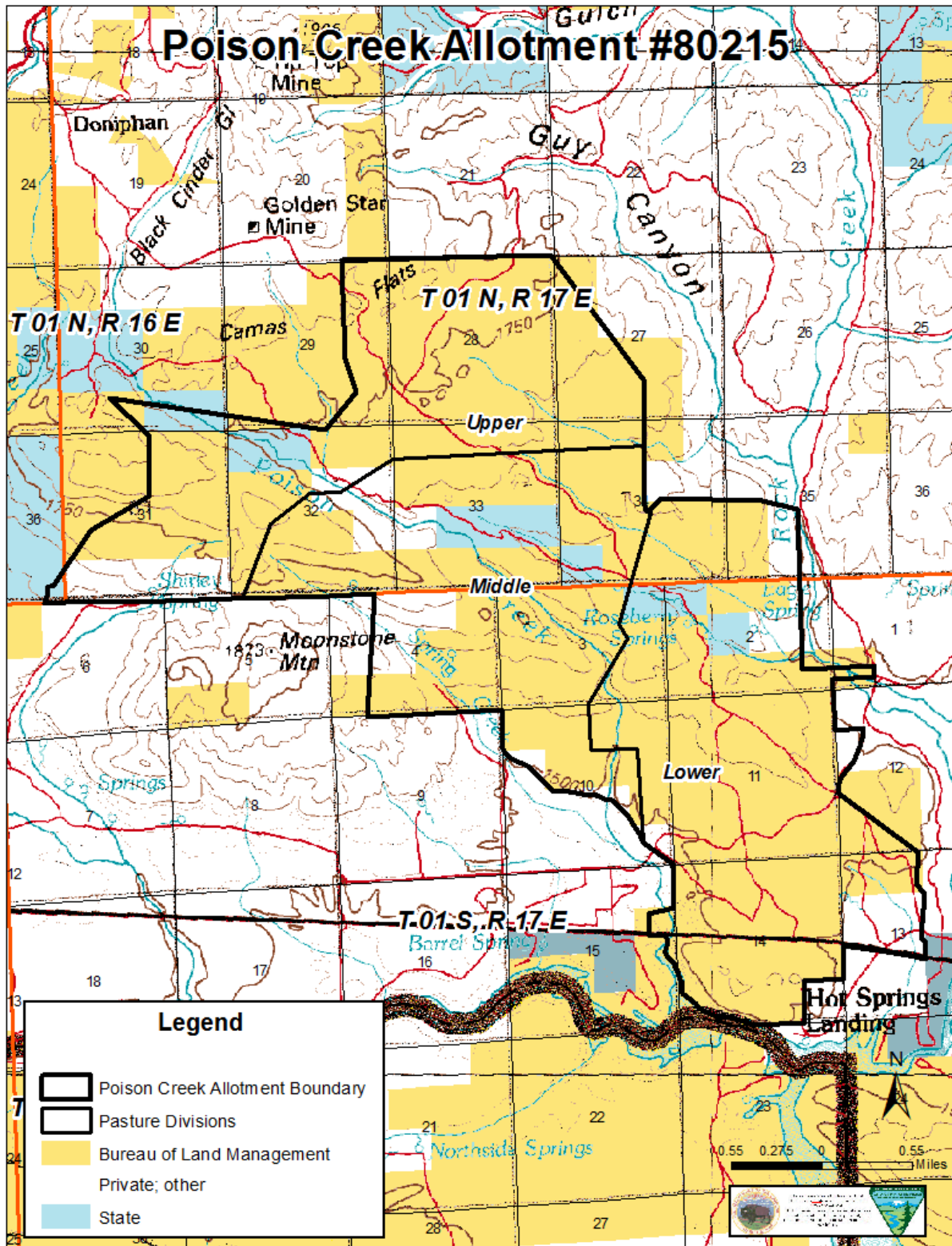
Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in

your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

For questions or comments, please contact Erik Kriwox, Rangeland Management Specialist, at (208) 732-7266.

Enclosures:

Poison Creek Allotment Maps



Poison Creek Allotment #80215

